

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00
DODE-00 DOTE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 FAA-00 L-03 SCS-06
CA-01 H-01 SS-15 NSC-05 PA-01 ICA-11 SSO-00 /076 W
-----050746 021654Z /42

P 021619Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8725

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E.O. 11652:N/A
TAGS: EAIR, CASC, U.K.
SUBJ: AIRLINE STANDBY SITUATION

REF: A) LONDON 11918; B) LONDON 11956; C) STATE 190015;
D) STATE 191802

1. SUMMARY: LARGE NUMBERS OF U.S. CITIZENS AND OTHER TRAVELLERS CONTINUE WAITING FOR STANDBY AND SKYTRAIN SEATS FROM LONDON TO U.S. AMBASSADOR HAS DISCUSSED SITUATION WITH U.K. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE, WHO SEEMED SYMPATHETIC TO NEED FOR ACTION. EMBASSY EXPLORING WITH VARIOUS GROUPS POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN WAITING CONDITIONS. NO IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENT IN SEAT AVAILABILITY FORESEEN. END SUMMARY.

2. SITUATION AT AIR TERMINALS BASICALLY UNCHANGED SINCE REFTELS ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER OF U.S. CITIZENS AWAITING FLIGHTS TO U.S. EITHER BY LAKER SKYTRAIN OR STANDBY HAS APPARENTLY INCREASED. NEWSPAPERS ESTIMATE AT LEAST 1500 AMERICANS PRESENTLY WAITING IN SELF-ORGANIZED AND SELF-REGULATED "QUEUES" FOR AVAILABLE SPACE. LAKER CONTINUES MOVING THE MOST PASSENGERS SINCE STANDBY SPACE ON REGULAR AIRLINES PRACTICALLY NONEXISTANT. NO IMPROVE
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MENT IN SEAT AVAILABILITY FORESEEN AT LEAST THROUGH MID-AUGUST. (LAKER HAS BEEN FLYING OCCASIONAL EXTRA SECTIONS AND AT ONE TIME PREDICTED THAT LINES WOULD BE DOWN TO MORE NORMAL LENGTHS BEFORE THIS WEEKEND. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO U.K. DEPARTMENT OF TRADE LAKER FINDS HE IS DRAWING UNEXPECTED NUMBERS OF TRAVELLERS FROM THE CONTINENT AND NOW RECOGNIZES THAT HIS EARLIER PREDIC-

TION WAS OVER-OPTIMISTIC.)

3. BECAUSE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH CAA INSTRUCTIONS, THE AIRLINES KEEP NO OFFICIAL WAITING LIST, THE PASSENGERS THEMSELVES HAVE ESTABLISHED THEIR OWN LISTS OF WHO CAME FIRST AT THE VARIOUS AIRLINE TERMINALS. THE LARGEST SUCH "QUEUE" IS AT LAKER WHERE MORE THAN 1500, ABOUT 70 PERCENT USCS, ARE WAITING OUTDOORS FOR THEIR TURN TO PURCHASE TICKETS FOR THE TWICE DAILY SKYTRAIN. PASSENGERS LEAVING TODAY (WEDNESDAY) HAVE BEEN WAITING SINCE SATURDAY. TO KEEP THEIR PLACE ON THIS INFORMAL LIST WOULD-BE PASSENGERS MUST REMAIN OR TAKE TURNS IN LINE AND ARE THUS CONFINED TO WAITING OUTDOORS NEAR VICTORIA STATION. WITH THE TOLERANCE OF THE POLICE THEY HAVE ESTABLISHED A "TENT CITY" WHERE A COMMENDABLE SPIRIT OF CAMARADERIE AND SHARING BOTH RESOURCES AND MISERY IS TAKING PLACE. THE RESTRAINT AND GOOD BEHAVIOR SHOWN SO FAR HAS HOWEVER BEEN DAMPENED BY FREQUENT AND CONTINUING RAIN AND THE WHOLE FABRIC OF COOPERATION COULD EASILY BE RENT WITHOUT EITHER SOME IMPROVEMENT IN WAITING CONDITIONS OR INCREASED HOPE OF AN EARLY RETURN HOME.

4. THREE SEPARATE DELEGATIONS OF PASSENGERS HAVE APPROACHED EMBASSY FOR ASSISTANCE AS WELL AS NUMEROUS INDIVIDUALS SEEKING ADVICE OR HELP IN OBTAINING SEATS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DODE-00 DOTE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 FAA-00 L-03 SS-15
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P 021619Z AUG 78

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HOME. REMARKABLY FEW HOWEVER HAVE YET ASKED FOR FINANCIAL HELP. MOST REQUESTS HAVE BEEN FOR EMBASSY PRESSURE ON AIRLINES TO INCREASE NUMBER OF FLIGHTS OR ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO PROVIDE SHELTER AND ADDITIONAL SANITARY FACILITIES FOR THOSE WAITING IN THE "QUEUES."

5. EMBASSY CONOFFS HAVE APPROACHED AIRLINES, LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS FOR ASSISTANCE IN IMPROVING WAITING CONDITIONS BUT SO FAR WITHOUT MUCH SUCCESS SINCE EACH SEES PROBLEM AS SOMEONE ELSE'S RESPONSIBILITY.

6. AMBASSADOR CALLED EVENING AUGUST 1 ON SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE DELL (RESPONSIBLE FOR CIVIL AVIATION MATTERS) TO ENCOURAGE ANY ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT BE TAKEN TO RELIEVE SITUATION OF WAITING PASSENGERS, PARTICULARLY THE INSTITUTION (PRESUMABLY BY AIRLINES) OF WAITING LISTS TO RELIEVE PASSENGERS OF NEED TO WAIT IN LINE THE MAJOR PART OF EACH DAY AND TO REMOVE POTENTIAL PROBLEM OF SAFETY AND ORDER SHOULD PRESENT INFORMAL SYSTEM BREAK DOWN. SUCH A SYSTEM WOULD ALLOW WAITING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PASSENGERS TO SEEK SHELTER AWAY FROM THE TERMINAL, RETURNING FOR SHORT PERIODS TO MAINTAIN THEIR POSITIONS ON THE LIST AND ULTIMATELY TO PURCHASE A TICKET. DELL SEEMED IMPRESSED BY THE NEED TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION AND ASKED THE CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY TO REEVALUATE ITS POSITION THAT FOR THE AIRLINES TO KEEP WAITING LISTS WOULD BE CONTRARY TO THE STANDBY CONCEPT. IN LAKER'S CASE, THE CAA HERETOFORE HAS SAID THAT NUMERICAL QUEUEING TO REPLACE WAITING LINES WOULD REQUIRE A MODIFICATION OF HIS LICENSE. DELL ALSO VOLUNTEERED THAT THE CAA WAS THINKING OF LIFTING THE CAPACITY LIMITATION ON STANDBY PASSENGERS. (THIS WAS A SHARP TURN AROUND SINCE THE CAA HAD ONLY THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY, AFTER A RENEWED BA REQUEST AND EMBASSY APPROACH PER REFTEL D, RESTATED IN STRONG TERMS ITS REFUSAL TO REMOVE THOSE LIMITATIONS.) BY THE END OF THE DAY WE SHOULD KNOW MORE OF THE CAA'S POSITION.

BREWSTER

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